

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

FEBRUARY 1999

ONE DOLLAR





Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr



One of the great pleasures of working with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is the opportunity to travel throughout the Commonwealth. We are certainly a diverse state, not only in our geography but also in our culture. We are blessed with tremendous natural resources that are available for us to enjoy.

It has been our pleasure in the past to highlight a region of the state in *Virginia Wildlife*, and this year is no exception. After reading the many articles on this area of Virginia, I am sure you will want to visit soon.

Nestled at the footsteps of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah National Park lies the counties of Fauquier, Rappahannock, Culpeper, Madison, Greene and Orange. It's a vast area of history and beauty. It's a place that proudly boasts that it's the home of James Madison, the fourth president of the United States. A place where food

and gracious living is taken to the highest level as with the Inn at Little Washington, which, by the way, was given the prestigious title of the nation's first five star inn and restaurant. Open year round for all those who wish to hike through it is a lush forest filled with mysterious colors known as the G. R. Thompson Wildlife Management Area. Considered to be a small slice of paradise, this WMA holds one of the largest concentrations of wildlife flowers found anywhere in Virginia.

For many, this area is known as the "Hunt Country," and the people who call it home have grown up with their hearts filled with the pleasures of living life to its fullest, as so well exemplified by the photograph found on the cover of this month's magazine. It is also a place where people still know how to enjoy the simpler pleasures in life, like a warm lazy summer day floating down the historic Rappahannock River

or watching a red-tailed hawk glide along a windy current as it migrates south for the winter.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries takes great pride in helping to maintain this wonderful part of Virginia as a place where wildlife and people can co-exist. As you slowly look through this issue of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine and reflect on the sights, please remember that this beauty and abundance of wildlife that you see didn't just happen by accident. It has taken the hard work of many people, groups and organizations to carry on these rich traditions and preserving a place where wildlife can thrive. Your support of the department and the work it does is greatly appreciated. We hope, after you have looked upon these pictures and memorable words, you will feel that it has all been well worth it.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

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The Inn at Little Washington, one of the nation's first five-star inns and restaurants. Opposite page: Large flowered trillium, G. R. Thompson Wildlife Management Area. Photos by Dwight Dyke.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: Foxhunting is one of Fauquier County's favorite sports—and one of its oldest. Photo by Dwight Dyke.

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A photographic journey looking at the people, places, and wildlife of the counties of Fauquier, Culpeper, Rappahannock, Orange, Madison and Greene.
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The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries works diligently to assure that hunting, fishing, boating and wildlife watching opportunities in the Commonwealth are there for everyone to enjoy. The "Virginia Hunt Country" is no exception.

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Photography by Dwight Dyke

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

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NUMBER 2



*Background: Foxhunting in Culpeper County.
Top: International Gold Cup at The Meadows,
Fauquier County.
Above: Flowers of the season adorn a stone wall in
Fauquier County.*

Photos by Dwight Dyke



Virginia Hunt Country



Above: Historic Washington, VA in Rappahannock County.

"This part of Virginia has soaked up more of the blood, sweat, and tears of American history than any other part of the country...It has bred more founding fathers, inspired more soaring hopes and ideals and witnessed more triumphs, failures, victories, and lost causes than any other place in the country."

*—C. Vann Woodward,
Yale University historian, 1994.*



It's like the difference between an old engraved L.C. Smith shotgun and a serviceable Remington 1100. Or a signature Carlos Santos, split-cane rod and a fiberglass two piece. That's what this part of Virginia that Thomas Jefferson called the Midlands, feels like.

There is nothing ordinary about the counties of Fauquier, Rappahannock, Culpeper, Greene, Orange, and Madison. Certainly, there

is the usual breathtaking beauty that each part of Virginia holds dear; and there is the rural character that refuses to be bowed by "move-ins" or urban encroachment. But there is more. There is an elegance combined with utility in this region; an unabashed love for the finer things in life, like foxhunting and horseback field trials; for traditions that include tailgate parties with crystal and silver. Here you will reach for Cabernet Sauvignon

over corn whiskey, a Barbour jacket instead of Carhartt; Orvis over Sears. Still, there is an undercurrent of the homespun deep in the counties, in tales of country stores, rabbit hunting, and late-night dog trading.

Here, the rough and the polished mingle without rancor. Because here, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge, people live exuberantly. For them, a life lived without a mixture of mischief and extravagance is no life at all.



From the elegance of an Upperville Horse Show in Fauquier County (far left), the ruins of a Jefferson-designed home in Barboursville (left), to a superb day of fishing on the Robinson River in Madison County (above), the Midlands of Virginia shows off its timeless riches. Below: Farm scene in Greene County. Background photo: Kinsey Run at Graves Mill, Madison County.





"This was a great place to grow up. You could walk outside your door and go hike a mountain. I live in Falls Church now and people ask me, 'What do you do out there?' I tell them, 'Well, you find your own fun.' That's what's so great about it. You know how to make fun with what you have to work with. Today, kids need Nintendo games to have fun. We didn't need that."

—Paula St. Onge, Fauquier County





Hiking in the Shenandoah National Park is a favorite pastime of residents of the area, like Paula St. Onge (opposite page on left), and tourists alike, as is birdwatching, fishing in Mountain Run Lake in Culpeper County (left), tubing on Lake Anna (bottom), and enjoying the sights at the International Gold Cup in Fauquier County (below).



"When I was growing up in the '60s, the roads didn't have names. Ours was a dirt road and so few traveled it that there was still grass growing up in it during the summertime. We lived in New Baltimore. Valley Green Farm was the old homeplace, and my father was born there. We had 555 acres, and my father, uncle, and grandfather farmed it. We had dairy and beef cattle and hogs, and raised corn and hay."

—Steve Browning, Fauquier County



Fauquier County is known both as horse country and cattle country—and for some, even llama country. Below right: Hide-Away Emu Ranch, Fauquier County. With urban pressures from Washington, D.C., it is trying its best to maintain its rural, yet elegant, character.







There's plenty of farm work to be done in Fauquier County (below right), but there's still time to relive the old battles of the Civil War (far left) and take in some fishing on the ever-productive farm ponds found throughout the county (left). Background: Pleasant Valley Farm, Rappahannock County.



"In the summertime, we'd constantly play Civil War in the woods. It was an all-day excursion. All the old stone walls were still intact, and we were so intent it was the Civil War.

We'd go down in the creeks and fish for bluegills. We always found something to do in the summertime. Every day we'd either play Army, or ride the work horses, or go in the barn and climb in the hayloft, or catch rabbits. Our parents would never look for us. We'd be gone."

—Steve Browning, Fauquier County



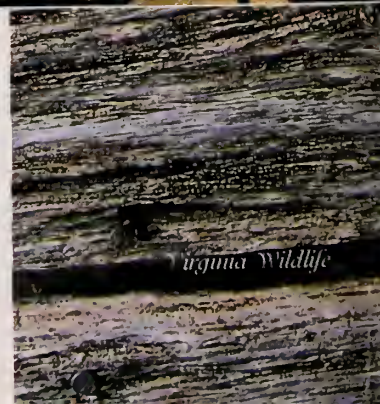


"It used to be that every little community around here had a country store. And people would gather around them at night after supper and after they'd done their chores and they'd sit around and all the stores would stay open 'till 11 or 12 o'clock at night. Two months before hunting season, all they'd talk about is hunting. You'd sit around eating rat cheese and buying shells and gun oil and talking and trading dogs—that was what they did. It was a big thing. But now, people are so busy. Everybody's working and everybody's got cable T.V."

—Harold Woodward,
Madison County



Reminiscent of the "good old days," the Madison County Country Store (above) and Montpelier Supply Company in Orange speak of a time that Harold Woodward (top, right), Madison County native and proprietor of Mountaineer Sporting Goods store, remembers well.





"People would sit around and talk about dogs they had 40 years before. Everybody would remember. A dog got a reputation in the community if he was a really good dog.

My granddaddy had a dog named Fritz and he was a great rabbit hunter—a benchleg beagle—and people would come from everywhere to go hunting with him—just for the chance to hunt and shoot a rabbit in front of Fritz. He lived to be 14 or 15 years old. When he died, for 20 years after that, people still talked about Fritz."

—Harold Woodward, Madison County



Above: Field trialing rabbit dogs is still a time-honored tradition in Madison. Steve Hoffman of Madison insists, "You'll trade a dozen dogs before you'll find a good one. If you have one or two good dogs in your life, that's all you'll ever have." Echoes Bill Price of Madison, "It's as hard to find a good dog as it is to find a good wife."



Orange County is still home to fine bird dogs. Elk Mountain Shiloh (right), a "Grouse Ridge" setter owned by Larry Rodgers, locks up on point at Oakland Shooting Preserve in Orange County. Above, two Brittannies take a break during the action in a field trial in Madison County.



Dr. H.Q. Tucker (above) is something of an icon in Orange County. A veterinarian by trade, he also introduced the first breeding stock of Tarentaise cattle, a high-quality beef and dairy breed, into Virginia in Orange County. Dr. Tucker was also a long-standing and well-loved member of the Virginia Amateur Field Trial Association, one of the oldest and most honorable field trial clubs in the country, counting nine of its members in the Field Trial Hall of Fame. The Virginia Amateur remembers its golden years from 1954-1968 when its trials were held at the 2,760-acre Hawfield Plantation in Orange County. Guy Lewis bought the land and turned it into one of the premier field trial grounds in the country, attracting the best dogs in the nation. Even today, the word "Hawfield" takes on mythic proportions in the field trial community, personifying an era of never-to-be-forgotten dogs and people.



"A good"



bird dog on point will make me cry.”

—Dr. H.Q. Tucker, Orange County

"We had all the top dogs in the U.S. running in the Virginia Amateur at Hawfield at one time. People would come from all over—from New Jersey, South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina."

—Dr. H.Q. Tucker, Orange County





*"Never brag on your own dog.
Let others do it."*

—Dave Pomfret, professional bird dog trainer,
Orange County

Keeping the field trial tradition of Orange County alive, Labore resident and field trial dog trainer Dave Pomfret (above) shows off a champion-hopeful, Buzzsaw Black Bart, owned by Judith Hamilton. Opposite is another fine bird hunter, "General," a German short-haired pointer owned by Dr. Rick Kildow. Right: German wire-haired pointers show their best at a field trial in Sumerduck.



"Hunting and fishing wasn't a sport here. It was a way of life. When I first started hunting, you could walk outside the house and hunt as far as you could see. You hunted for food. The only groceries you bought were sugar, flour, coffee, salt, and sugar."

—Sammy Foster, Rappahannock County





Sammy Foster (opposite page) was born and raised in Rappahannock County, outside of Flint Hill, in a house built in 1812. "The house had 18-inch rock walls with rooms so big you had to have a good arm to throw a biscuit from one side to the other," says Sammy. Dove hunting (above) in the fall and winter continues to be one of the many cherished hunting traditions in the county (Dove photo ©Eugene Hester).



Orange County resident, Billy Brockman.

"There are some pretty well-bred people in Orange. A lot of families here have been able to hold onto a lot of land some way, somehow."

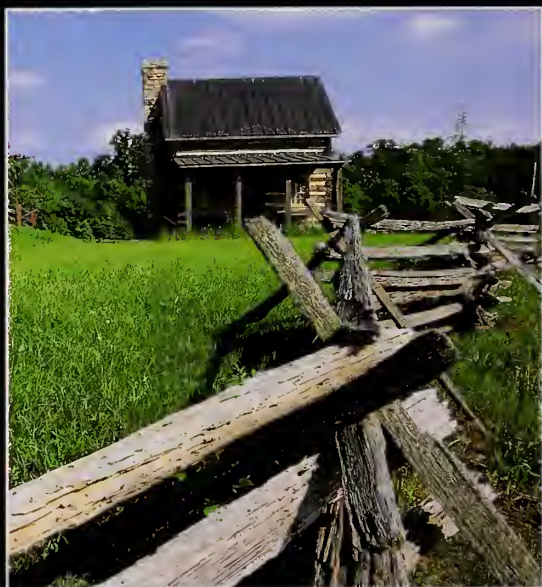
—Billy Brockman, Orange County.

*"Orange is cosmopolitan
enough to take the crimson
off the neck."*

—Dave Pomfret, Orange County



The town of Orange had its beginnings in 1749 as a courthouse town, making it 250 years old this year. It has a long history of hospitality. One of the first orders of the court was to license a certain Timothy Crosthwait to establish an ordinary or tavern in his home. The town has since entertained such luminaries as Thomas Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette, and was the birthplace of President James Madison. Today Orange hosts the famous Montpelier Races at James Madison's renovated homeplace, Montpelier (gardens are pictured above). The Orange courthouse (opposite, top left) and train station (opposite, top right) have both seen much of this country's history played out, from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. Background photo: Inverness Farm in Orange County.



Top: Banjo player Frank Necessary, Madison County. Above: Cabin near Ruth in Madison County. Background: Common scene of the bond between horse and girl in Orange County.

"There's an amazing bond you can form with a horse. It's a shame that we drive cars all the time. The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man."

—Patrick Dubenitz, Fauquier County



The counties of the Midlands of Virginia still offer its youngsters a door to the natural world. Above: Feeding geese at Mountain Run Lake in Culpeper County.

"You don't come in here with the attitude of a carpetbagger. This is a different world here. There's so much history. I think the people who are happiest here are people who really and truly value things that make for the quality of life. It's not how big, or how fast or how many, but things that have to do with the quality of life.

Things that add to the quality of life never end up in the landfill."

**—Keith Severin,
Fauquier County**

Virginia's Hunt Country

Managing A Land of Con

by Bob Gooch

Dawn is breaking along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains. At first light the sun's still-feeble rays begin to brush the high country; 4,049-foot Hawksbill Mountain and Stony Man Mountain at 4,010 feet. As the bright orange ball rises above the eastern horizon, its glow gains strength and creeps slowly down the eastern slopes of the famous mountains, sending its warmth into deep hollows and singing trout streams. The rolling foothills will come later, and finally the flats along the winding Rappahannock River.

As the new day comes alive, a backpacker breaks camp high in the mountains, shoulders his pack, and heads north along the Appalachian Trail, following the spine of the Blue Ridge Mountains. At approximately the same time, and far to the east, a pair of bass anglers launch their boat on the still waters of Lake Anna using the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' ramp just off of U. S. Highway 522. Such is the diversity of the region local citizens fondly call "the hunt or horse country," the counties of Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock. It's a place of contrasts, interesting and picturesque country, and its citizens take pride in its uniqueness.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' presence is strong in this country, which is able to retain its rural charms in the very shadows of the ever expanding Washington D.C. sprawl. Some of Virginia's most avid anglers and hunters live there enjoying good fishing in nearby waters and hunting in close-to-home coverts—thanks in no small part to the Department's efforts.

Three wildlife management areas, the G. Richard Thompson and Rapidan wildlife management areas along the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area along the upper reaches of the Rappahannock River together claim over 18,000 acres of this country. Collectively they offer

to the public mountains, rolling hills, lakes, and river valleys.

Five designated trout streams, visited regularly by Department hatchery personnel and stocking trucks, provide good fishing for brook and rainbow trout. There are also sparkling native trout streams on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains that receive the loving care of Department fisheries biologists. The Department also owns and manages two warm-water fishing lakes, and manages several others for public fishing.



trasts



Background photo: Skyline Drive in the Shenandoah National Park. Above: A biker on the Appalachian Trail takes in the view from a spectacular mountaintop in the Shenandoah National Park. Right: Bowhunting is a favorite sport in Culpeper County.

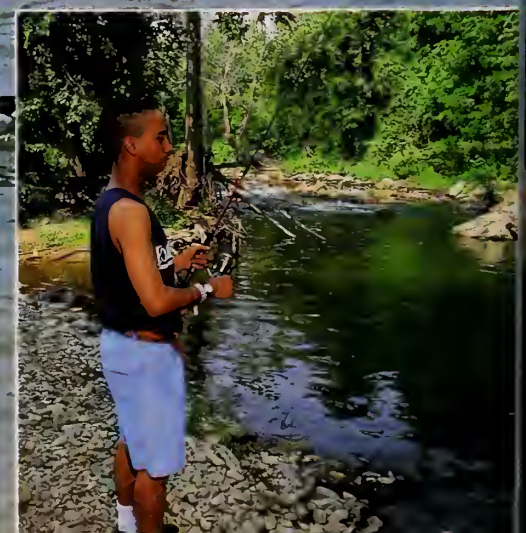
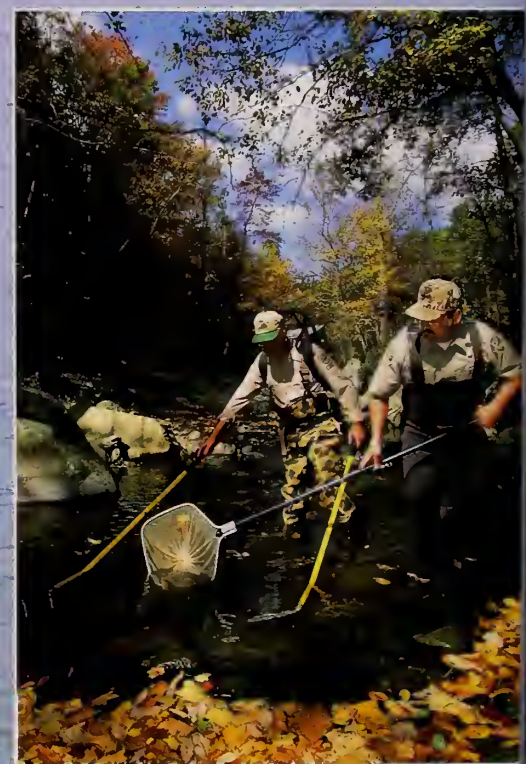




Department of Game and Inland Fisheries access points and boat ramps offer access to the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers and some of the best smallmouth bass fishing in the state. Lake Anna, 9,600 acres of prime fishing water, is owned by Virginia Power Company, but managed for fishing by the Department.

At 10,326 acres, the Rapidan Wildlife Management Area, primarily in Madison County, is a major Department of Game and Inland Fisheries holding in this region. A small section, known as the South River Tract, is located along the South River, a popular trout fishing stream in Greene County. This is rugged mountain country along the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains bordering on the Shenandoah National Park. Elevations range from 900 to 3,500 feet. Big game hunters know it best for its bear hunting, but bird hunters probe its deep valleys for grouse and an occasional woodcock. Deer and turkey populations are growing, and most years there is an abundance of squirrels. Some good trout fishing is found in the rushing mountain streams. The Conway River and its tributary, Devil's Ditch, are noted for their native brook trout, but there are also wild populations of brown trout in the lower stretches of the

Background photo: Sampling the waters in Culpeper County is an important task for department biologists trying to maintain healthy fisheries. Lake Orange (above) is a treat for the bream angler; Mountain Run Lake in Culpeper County (above right) yields excellent largemouth bass; electrofishing in the Rapidan River in Madison County (right) helps biologists gather crucial information about streams; and trout fishing on the Robinson River in Madison County (below) can produce some nice catches for the angler.





Birdwatching on Lake Pelham in Culpeper County.

Conway. Damaged by floods several years ago, the streams are now slowly recovering under the watchful eyes of Department fisheries biologists. "The floods all but wiped out the fish populations," said Regional Fisheries Manager John Kauffman. The Rapidan River is a nationally known fish-for-fun native brook trout stream shared by the Shenandoah National Park and the wildlife management area. "The Rapidan also received significant damage from the big floods," said Kauffman. "Ninety percent of the trout population was wiped out in the lower elevations, but the population is slowly recovering as stream-side vegetation returns." The Staunton Run, also noted for the same kind of fishing, is a major tributary of the Rapidan. Numerous roads and trails make this area pop-

ular among backpackers. To reach much of the Rapidan Wildlife Management Area it is necessary to cross the Shenandoah National Park lands and over the years the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and officials of the Park have enjoyed an excellent working relationship, which guarantees wildlife management area users access to the area.

Farther to the north in Fauquier County and also along the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains is the 4,000-acre G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area. Small portions of the Davenport Tract extend into Clarke and Warren counties. It, too, is rugged mountain country. "It's straight up," said Robert Henson, wildlife biologist assistant who manages this area as well as the Chester F. Phelps Wildlife

Management Area. Elevations range from 700 to 2,200 feet. Deer and a growing population of wild turkeys draw big game hunters, and small game hunters will find grouse, squirrels, and woodcock. Black bear also roam the area, but neither Clarke, Fauquier or Warren counties are currently open to bear hunting. Ten-acre Thompson Lake is stocked with trout, but the little lake also holds catfish, sunfish, and smallmouth bass. The lake is located in the northeastern corner of the management area just off of Secondary Route 688. A major spring season attraction in this wildlife management area is an amazing display of wild flowers, particularly trillium.

The Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area, primarily in Fauquier County, was once farming country. Of its 4,539 acres, 1,000 remain open, the rest being mixed hardwood and pine forests. A small portion of the area is located in Culpeper County. Most of the area is gently rolling hill country with some flat land along the Rappahannock River. Managed dove fields are possibly the major hunting attraction here, though the deer and wild turkey populations get plenty of attention. Somewhat unique to this area is land set aside for physically



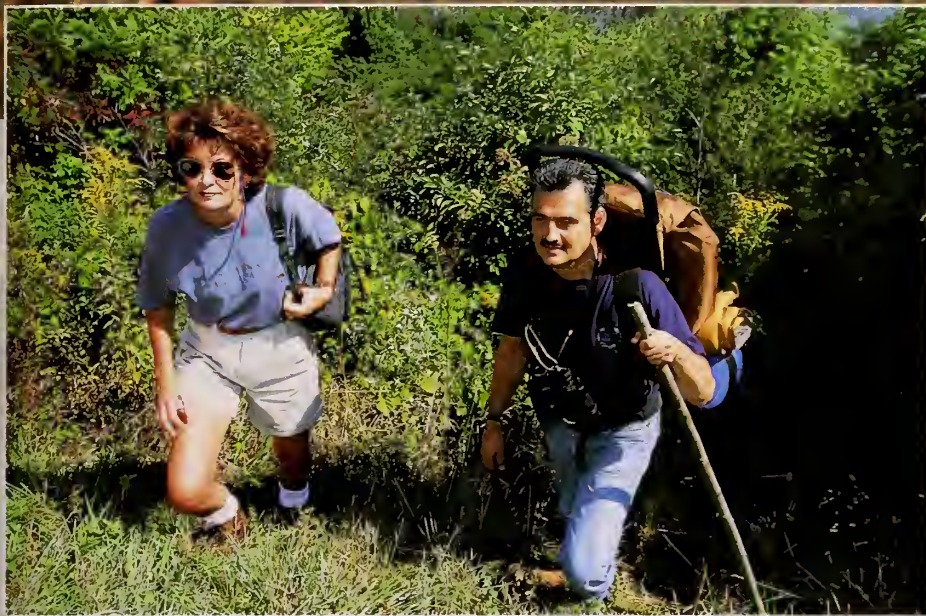
handicapped hunters. Other small game includes quail, rabbits, and squirrels. Several species of ducks use the Rappahannock River, which forms much of the western border of the wildlife management area. A three-acre pond near the manager's residence offers fishing for bluegill, catfish, largemouth bass, and sunfish. The six- to seven-mile stretch of the Rappahannock River that borders the area offers good fishing for smallmouth bass and redbreast sunfish. On the Culpeper County side of the Rappahannock River, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Kellys Ford access area and boat launching ramp area provides easy access to the popular smallmouth bass stream. Unfortunately, there is currently no public exit from the river until you reach Motts Landing approximately 25 miles downstream.

Jerry Sims, Department Regional Wildlife Manager, is very pleased with a new 20-acre waterfowl area on this wildlife management area. "It's an impoundment that we can draw down during the warm months to allow the growth of vegetation. In the fall we flood it to attract and hold ducks. Working with the local chapter of Waterfowl U. S. A., which furnished most of the materials, we have built two blinds and we can accommodate two hunting parties." Hunting is allowed on Saturdays only. Prospective hunters enter a drawing held in September. Those lucky to be picked are issued hunting permits.

Several Department lakes highlight the agency's fisheries management in the region, 124-acre Orange County Lake in Orange County and 77-acre Lake Brittle in Fauquier County. Orange County Lake offers fishing for bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, largemouth bass, northern pike, and walleye, whereas Lake Brittle holds bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, largemouth bass, redear sunfish, and walleye. Both lakes have good launching ramps, fishing piers, concession stands, and rental boats.

The Department also manages the fisheries in several other lakes, including 255-acre Pelham Lake and 75-acre Mountain Run Lake both in Culpeper





Clockwise from opposite page: DGIF employees prepare a new waterfowl blind for hunters on the Chester F. Phelps WMA; hiking in the Shenandoah National Park; ruffed grouse (photo ©Leonard Lee Rue); DGIF Sgt. Jim Bankston takes care of business at Washington's The Trading Post in Rappahannock County. Background: whitetail bucks, (photo ©Leonard Lee Rue)

County. The fish populations in lakes owned or managed by the Department are checked periodically. "We electrofished Mountain Run Lake recently and found some true trophy largemouth bass and an abundance of sizable redear sunfish," said Senior Fisheries Biologist Ed Steinkoenig.

The Department's trout management program is concentrated in Greene and Madison counties where the Lynch and South rivers in Greene and the Hughes, Robinson,

and Rose rivers in Madison are designated trout waters and are stocked periodically with hatchery-reared trout. "Restoration work on the Rose, that was severely damaged in the floods, is now complete," said Regional Fisheries Manager John Kauffman, "but some spring planting along its banks to control erosion is scheduled for this year." These streams flow through private lands and are open to the public for trout fishing, thanks to agreements between the Department and the landowners. In Rappahannock County the headwaters of Hazel, Piney and the North Fork of the Thornton rivers are managed as wild trout waters. All three of these streams form in the Shenandoah National Park.

The major smallmouth bass streams in the region are the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers. Many other streams, such as Goose Creek, and the Hazel and Robinson rivers also offer fishing for smallmouth bass, but there is, unfortunately, no public access to these rivers other than highway crossings. The Department's work of securing public access to the Rapidan and Rappahannock and building launching facilities has opened them to fishing and canoeing. Incidentally, the Rappahannock is designated as a Virginia Scenic River. The Rapidan flows through Greene, Madison, Orange, and Culpeper counties. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries access points and launching ramps at Ely Ford and Racoon Ford offer access to the Rapidan River.

Over the years the Department has developed good working relationships with sportsmans organizations in the area. One good example is the youth trout fishing day on the Rose River in Madison County. This section of the river is open to trout fishing thanks to the Graves family who own the land through which it flows. On this one day, usually a Saturday in late March or early April, the river is reserved for kids

only. Adults cannot fish though they can assist the youngsters, giving them advice and helping them remove their hooks from the mouths of the captured trout. The Rapidan chapter of Trout Unlimited initiated the program a number of years ago, and the Department cooperates by stocking the stream with catchable-size trout the day before the kids fish. Department law enforcement personnel are usually there to lend a helping hand.

Another good example of the Department's presence in this area is the work Warden Thomas E. McElroy is doing with the Greene County schools. He lives in Standardsville and teaches wildlife classes in the public school system. Teaching youngsters to respect the law instead of fearing it can do wonders to produce true sportsmen among the ranks of the next generation of anglers and hunters.

The days are seldom dull among the many outdoors people who live and play in the counties of Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock. The sun dropping behind the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains to create a spectacular sunset can be a fitting finale for a busy day outdoors in this interesting slice of the Old Dominion. □

Bob Gooch is an outdoor columnist and has authored numerous books on hunting and fishing. Bob has also been a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife magazine for more than 25 years.

Right: Warden Thomas McElroy gives a wildlife presentation to preschoolers in Standardsville in Greene County, part of DGIF's commitment to educating Virginia's youngsters on the value of the Commonwealth's wildlife resources.



February Afield

by Jack Randolph

February is a strange month on the sportsman's calendar. Most of the hunting seasons are closed and only the die-hard anglers are afield. Yet, this can be an exciting month for anglers and hunters. The General Assembly, which is in session, usually provides a few interesting tidbits, but Mother Nature has enough things going for her to keep most outdoorsmen busy.

This is a fine month for crow hunting. With the closure of most hunting seasons last month many farmers welcome crow hunters.

Motorists should be more careful than usual this month, especially at night when love sick skunks and opossums are abroad. During the middle of the month we are usually treated to the sight of hundreds of robins on our lawns, as the birds return for another spring and summer.

The sun is a little warmer in February and the small ponds, coves and creeks are the first to benefit. Fishing ponds in the afternoon, after the sun has warmed the water, often produces big bass. Last February a cove in Briery Creek Lake surrendered a bass that weighed 10 pounds, 10½ ounces! The sun-warmed shallow creeks off of Buggs Island Lake in February have the reputation for offering the kinds of huge crappie that anglers' dreams are made of.

Probably the first freshwater fish to come to mind this month is the yellow perch which makes spawning runs up such rivers as the Chickahominy, Mattaponi and the Pamunkey. The Rappahannock, at the mouth of Massaponax Creek, is also a likely spot for big perch. Big blue catfish bite well this month in the James, Chickahominy and Rappahannock rivers.

Not so well-known are the runs of walleyes in the Staunton River above Buggs Island Lake and the Appomattox River above Lake Chesdin. The Staunton probably has the edge in popularity as anglers catch pretty walleye on buck-tails, plastic jigs and minnows. This is also prime time for catching a big musky out of the New River or from the many reservoirs in which they have been stocked.

I hate to inject a sour note into an upbeat subject, but it is income tax time again, which means it is the time we have the opportunity to share our state tax refunds with the very worthwhile nongame wildlife fund.

Becoming more and more popular is whale watching off of Virginia Beach. The two-hour trips often give observers the opportunity to see fin and humpback whales close up. Call (757) 437-2628 for reservations.

In the ocean, the striped bass season is still open and trollers frequently catch huge striped bass right along the Virginia Beach oceanfront. Of course, a few knowing anglers will continue to catch big speckled trout and some puppy drum from the Virginia Power warm outflow, called the "Hot Ditch" in the Elizabeth River. If the water temperatures hold in the mid-40s, nice tautogs will be available on the inshore wrecks off of Virginia Beach and the Eastern Shore.

There is among the old salts a saying that the water in the ocean and the bay is coldest on February 10 of each year. After that date it starts to warm up. Actually, this rule is surprisingly accurate. Let's see how well it does this year. □



It's Tax Time!

Remember the Virginia Nongame Tax Checkoff

If you are due a tax refund from the Commonwealth of Virginia, you can take advantage of this opportunity to contribute to nongame wildlife management and conservation by simply marking your tax return in the appropriate place, (Schedule 1, Form 760, Line A. Virginia Nongame Wildlife Program). All funds for Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Program are generated by donations and a tax checkoff on the Virginia State Income Tax Form.

When you do this, you are supporting the essential research and management of Virginia's native birds, fishes, and other nongame animals that make Virginia's outdoors a unique place.

Remember the Nongame Wildlife Tax Checkoff as you do your Virginia state taxes this year, and support Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Program.

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On The Water

by Kathy Gillikin, Boating Education Instructor

Thinking About Buying a Boat?

During January through April many boat show events will take place around the state. Before getting near the shiny new temptations at any boat show it is smart to think about the “why” and “what” of your major recreational purchase. If you are thinking about buying your first boat, here are some considerations to help you make your investment decision.

1. **Purpose**—The purpose of buying a boat is *not* to see what you can get away with buying before your spouse finds out. **The purpose of buying your boat is to enjoy a particular form of water recreation, to get from Point A to Point B, or a combination thereof.** Your first step is to decide how you and your family will use the boat most often. Where do you want to operate your boat: on lakes and rivers or the ocean? Will you need a lot of room to move around in the boat?

2. **Affordability**—Unfortunately, the budget will often determine the boat you can buy. If possible, buy a name brand that has a good manufacturing and maintenance reputation for the type of boat you are looking for, whether it's primarily for fishing, water skiing, hunting, cruising, scuba diving, sailing, etc. **Do some research about the manufacturer, warranties and the history of repairs or problems for a particular model.** You may also want to consider used boats, which can be in terrific shape—just used for a season or two.

3. **Size**—How much space will you need on this boat and how will you store the boat when it's not in

use? A trailerable boat is more easily transported to different waterways, easier to store over the winter and is less costly to keep. You will need to have a vehicle that can support the weight of the trailer, boat and car, however. A large boat may require special transportation, dock or dry docking fees, which can be expensive over time.

4. **Power**—Even for a sailboat an engine is useful. Consider the type of engine you will need. **Outboards** are the most popular because of their lightweight, engine and drive system combination, and great power for their size. **Inboard engines** are quiet and better for large boats. **Stern drives, or inboard/outboard engines,** are more quiet and powerful with an exterior drive system.

5. **Storage**—You will want to protect your boat from the weather to maintain its new appearance and hold the boat's value. **Garages** are great for trailerable boats. Many boaters simply use a **high quality boat cover (nylon or vinyl)** and keep the boat on the trailer in the backyard, if this is acceptable in the community. You will want to **consider security issues** to be sure someone else doesn't just hitch your trailer to their vehicle and take it away. If your boat is left outside, make it difficult for a vehicle to hitch-up to the boat and unlock your trailer. Large boats will need to be kept at the dock or be dry-docked.

6. **Negotiate**—Just like buying an automobile, prices on boats will vary. Once you determine the type of boat and some possible name

brands you are interested in, start shopping the price. **Package deals are often the best and may include the engine, electronics and other installations done at the factory instead of by the dealer.** Think about any special maintenance deals and warranties that may be included. This can save you hundreds of dollars in the long run.

7. **Insurance**—Although boat insurance is not required by law, it only takes one minor accident to realize that boat repairs are expensive. **Many insurance companies will offer 5-15 percent discounts to those who successfully complete a U. S. Coast Guard approved safety course.**

8. **Education**—Before you buy any boat, please learn the safety rules of operating a boat. You will learn the proper way to pass another boat, what to do about head-on situations, how to cross a waterway, about waterway markers, sound signals, the best ways to dock in a current, etc. **Many FREE U. S. Coast Guard approved boating safety courses are offered by the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries. Call 1-804-367-1125 to be directed to the coordinator in your region of Virginia for course information.** You may be able to schedule a 6-hour course for your large group. The United States Power Squadrons and U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary are two other good sources of boating courses.

Be smart and plan ahead to be safe. Take a boating safety course! □

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

Warm Up With Fish Chowder

What's better for a cold winter day than a steaming bowl of fish chowder? Chowders are easy to prepare and nourishing as well.

Any of our Virginia firm fish make excellent chowder. These would include large bass of all species, catfish, striped bass and walleye. You will need boneless fillets which have been skinned.

Menu

Easy Fish Chowder

Calico Broccoli Slaw

Popovers

Elegant Baked Apples

Easy Fish Chowder

1 pound fish fillets, boned and skinned
 ½ cup chopped onion
 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
 2 cups cubed potatoes
 1 cup boiling water
 2 cups milk
 1 can (8 ounces) cream-style corn
 Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Cut fish fillets into 1-inch squares. In a 3-quart pot, melt butter and cook onion until soft. Add potatoes, water and fish. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Add milk and corn; heat thoroughly. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve at once, piping hot. Makes 4 servings.

Calico Broccoli Slaw

⅓ cup cider vinegar

¼ cup apple juice
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1 teaspoon sugar
 Seasoned salt to taste
 2 cups thinly sliced red or green cabbage
 2 cups shredded broccoli stems
 2 medium carrots, shredded

In large bowl, combine first 5 ingredients. Add cabbage, broccoli and carrots. Toss well to blend ingredients. Cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate until chilled, about 2 hours, tossing occasionally. Makes 6 servings.

Popovers

1 cup flour
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 3 eggs
 1 cup buttermilk
 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted, plus 6-9 teaspoons unsalted butter

Preheat oven to 425°F. In a bowl, combine milk, flour and salt. Add eggs, buttermilk and 1 tablespoon melted butter and beat vigorously to the consistency of heavy cream, about 2 minutes. Put 1 teaspoon butter into each popover cup and place in the oven until butter bubbles, a few seconds. Remove from the oven and fill each cup half full of batter. Return to the oven and bake for 20 minutes. Reduce heat to 325°F. and bake until popovers are browned and have risen above the rims of the cups, 15 to 20 minutes longer. Remove from the oven and pierce each popover with a thin skewer to let air escape. Return to oven for a few seconds. Serve immediately.

Elegant Baked Apples

4 large baking apples
 ⅓ cup firmly packed brown sugar
 ⅓ cup sweetened, dried cranberries
 3 tablespoons finely chopped candied ginger
 ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
 1 tablespoon butter or margarine, at room temperature
 ⅓ cup apple juice or apple cider
 1 tablespoon granulated sugar

Preheat oven to 325°F. Using a vegetable peeler, and working from the blossom end, peel the apples about half-way down. Using an apple corer, core them. Place the apples, larger ends down, in a baking dish just large enough to hold them comfortably. In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, dried cranberries, ginger, cinnamon and butter. Using the back of a spoon, mash the ingredients together until blended into a damp, crumbly paste. Pack about 2 tablespoons of the mixture in the center of each apple, pressing it in with your fingers. Pour the apple juice or cider into the dish. Cover the dish snugly with aluminum foil and bake for about 40 minutes. Remove from the oven and sprinkle the apples evenly with granulated sugar. Return to the oven and bake about 10 minutes uncovered, until the apples are tender when pierced with the tip of a sharp knife. Transfer apples to individual dessert plates and spoon the pan juices over them. Serves 4.

